

## 2. TAKING STOCK OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IN THE VISEGRAD FOUR

### 2.1. Czech Republic

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#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the Czech Republic's (CR) contribution to the shaping of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) paying special attention to the Visegrad Group as one of the most important multilateral platforms which focus on the EU's Eastern policies. The chapter is divided into six sections: the first briefly introduces the basic domestic conditions under which the CR's Eastern policy was conceived; the second analyzes the historical evolution of the EaP and the role of the Czech Republic; the third discusses the political context including the positions held by key political actors in the country and the views of the public. The next two subchapters describe the Czech initiatives in both the bilateral and the multilateral dimensions of the EaP. The final section puts forwards several recommendations, aimed both at improving the quality of the Czech institutions dealing with the EaP and at a more effective functioning of the Visegrad Four (V4).

#### **The general background of Czech Eastern policy**

The Eastern policy of the Czech Republic is characterized by two distorting factors that strongly influence both the decision making procedures in the country and the political relations with East European countries. The first of these influences, which started to decline only recently, is the general Russo-centric view of the relations. Some Czech politicians

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focus on Russia as being the only economically and politically relevant partner in the East (most notably, this is true of President Václav Klaus as well as the Czech left – the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party). However, those who fear the growing influence of Russia in Central and Eastern Europe are often also obsessed with Russia and see it as the only regional actor worth their attention. Hence, relations with countries like Ukraine or Armenia were, until recently, seen only through the prism of Czech–Russian relations.

Secondly, although today Eastern Europe firmly belongs among Czech foreign policy priorities, this statement has to be qualified in several ways. To start with, Czech priorities have undergone several fundamental changes in the last twenty years. The motto of the 1990s “Return to Europe” was consensually interpreted as “away from Soviet influence” in the Czech political scene. Hence, the Czech efforts to join both NATO and the European Union were seen as incomparably more important than relations with Eastern European countries. Additionally, even among non-EU priority regions, Eastern Europe (and the European Neighborhood Policy, ENP) had to compete with the Balkans as the main area of Czech foreign policy interests. For instance, as late as 2003, the newly conceived Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic did not mention the ENP.<sup>174</sup> It was only around 2006 that Eastern European and the ENP began consistently appearing among the top priorities of Czech foreign policy.<sup>175</sup>

While the political elites have at least partially turned their gaze to Eastern Europe, this cannot be said about the general public. Interest in countries lying beyond the CR’s immediate neighborhood and outside the EU is generally rather limited and questions related to the East European states now participating in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) are met with indifference. This claim is supported by the Eurobarometer surveys. The last comprehensive poll that explored the attitudes of EU citizens towards neighboring countries, published in 2007, shows that out of the twenty-seven EU member states, the Czech public is the least interested in the neighborhood. Only 27 per cent of Czechs expressed interest in the

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<sup>174</sup> “Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky na léta 2003–2006,” Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2002. Available online: [www.stary.mepoforum.sk/index.php?id=80&downid=43](http://www.stary.mepoforum.sk/index.php?id=80&downid=43) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. e.g. A. Vondra, “Česká zahraniční politika: tři principy, troji směřování a tři témata,” *Mezinárodní politika*, No. 11, 2006, pp. 17–19.

events occurring in the neighborhood, compared to, for example, 47 per cent in Germany and 59 per cent in France.<sup>176</sup>

Even though the indifference of the Czech public towards the Eastern neighborhood is often ignored in political analyses since the political elites take a more active role, the public's attitude towards Eastern Europe might prove to be strongly destabilizing in the future; for instance should the public be asked to approve further visa liberalization or financial transfers to the neighborhood. At the moment, however, the popular indifference seems to be beneficial for the political elite, whose decisions regarding Czech Eastern policy are not under close scrutiny.<sup>177</sup> Yet as much as the current state of affairs might be welcomed by Czech decision-makers, the low level of knowledge about and interest in the Eastern neighborhood among the Czech populace runs counter to the frequent calls for a more visible presence of the Eastern neighborhood in Czech political debates.

### **The CR and the evolution of the EaP**

Unlike in the case of the ENP, where the CR was a late-comer (even compared to some other candidate countries/new member states like Poland),<sup>178</sup> Prague's diplomats were successful in getting their hands on the Eastern Partnership from its very inception. The prehistory of the Eastern Partnership should be dated back to the multilateral initiatives of the Visegrad Four. During the Czech presidency in the Visegrad Group from June 2007 to June 2008, the country's representatives repeatedly underlined the importance of a more equitable allocation of financial resources to the Eastern and Southern dimension of the ENP in parallel with paying special attention to the EU's Eastern neighbors.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> "The EU's relations with its neighbors", Official Site of the European Commission. Available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_285\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_285_en.pdf), p. 11 (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>177</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2, 2011.

<sup>178</sup> P. Kratochvíl, E. Tulmets, *Checking the Czech role in the European Neighbourhood*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, May 2007. Available online: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/prag/06166.pdf> (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>179</sup> Summit předsedů vlád zemí Visegrádské skupiny v Praze 16. června 2008. Vláda České republiky. Available online: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/tema/tema:-summit-predsedu-vlad-zemi-visegradske-skupiny-v-praze-16--cervna-2008-36394/> (accessed on November 14, 2011)

A second step towards the creation of the Eastern Partnership, in which the CR was involved, was the Czech proposal concerning the Eastern dimension of the ENP, which was discussed at the meeting of the working group on Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST) in April 2008. It is often claimed that the Czech proposal was more or less identical to the later initiative presented by Poland and Sweden. Yet the proposals differed on several important accounts, especially as far as functional project orientation and the multilateral format are concerned. In spite of these differences, Czech diplomacy supported the Swedish–Polish proposal, which came out only the next month. Interestingly, this support was not enthusiastic since many at the Czech Foreign Ministry believed that the Polish initiative should have been first consulted and later also presented as a common Visegrad Group proposal and not as a separate initiative. These differences were soon forgotten, though, for pragmatic reasons, and the CR joined a hand with Poland and Sweden to participate in the preparations for the new version of the proposal which was handed over to the European Commission on October 3, 2008.<sup>180</sup>

It is obvious that the influence of the Czech diplomats on the final shape of the Polish–Swedish proposal was boosted by the upcoming Czech EU presidency. Generally speaking the priorities of the Czech presidency relating to the EaP were quite ambitious, including goals such as “the deepening of energy, economic, trade and environmental partnerships; respect for fundamental rights and freedoms; support for democratization and transformation processes; facilitating mobility and management of migration; supporting mutual contacts on various levels; and political and security cooperation.”<sup>181</sup>

On the practical level, the efforts of the CR concentrated on the successful launch of the Eastern Partnership, i.e. on the Eastern Partnership Summit held on May 7, 2009. This was linked to the general tenor of the Czech diplomacy about the more equitable balance between the Southern

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<sup>180</sup> “Polish-Swedish paper with the support of the incoming Czech presidency. Elaboration of the Eastern Partnership,” October 3, 2008 cf. also the analysis in B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, eds., *Eastern Partnership: the opening report*, Warsaw: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2009. Available online: [http://www.sipri.org/research/security/euroatlantic/eu-seminar/documentation/Raport\\_p\\_w\\_2008%20ang.pdf](http://www.sipri.org/research/security/euroatlantic/eu-seminar/documentation/Raport_p_w_2008%20ang.pdf) (accessed on November 14, 2011)

<sup>181</sup> “Work programme of the Czech Presidency Europe without barriers,” Official site of the Czech presidency. Available online: [http://www.eu2009.cz/assets/news-and-documents/news/cz-pres\\_programme\\_en.pdf](http://www.eu2009.cz/assets/news-and-documents/news/cz-pres_programme_en.pdf) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

and Eastern Dimensions of the ENP, both in terms of political attention and financial resources. As far as the latter is concerned, the lobbying for stronger financial support for the EaP was somewhat hampered by the looming economic recession. Still, the increase in EaP financial support from €350 million to €600 million would not have been possible but for the sustained diplomatic efforts of the Czech presidency which secured the assent of all the member states.<sup>182</sup>

During the presidency, the CR did not suggest creating a substantial institutional structure parallel to the highly institutionalized cooperation within the Southern dimension. Even though the CR was very much in favor of multilateral cooperation among the partner countries, the bilateral ties between the EU and individual partners were seen as crucial. This institutional flexibility also allowed the country's diplomats more room for maneuver, especially when discussing the potential future inclusion of third party participants in the EaP. As a result, Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg claimed that other countries such as Russia and Turkey could take part in the Partnership.<sup>183</sup> It is nevertheless important to stress that those analysts who believe that this was a Czech priority could not be more mistaken.<sup>184</sup> This tactical move was intended to accommodate the demands of those EU members who wanted to see the inclusion of Russia in the project (Germany and France, primarily), but privately Czech diplomats expressed a strong aversion towards any possible inclusion of Russia in the project, fearing that this step might make the EaP as unsuccessful as some of the other regional initiatives in which Russia took part (especially in the Black Sea area).

For the sake of the EaP's success, Czech diplomats were prepared to make substantial tactical concessions not only to Russia (by dampening

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<sup>182</sup> B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, op. cit.

<sup>183</sup> "Czech presidency not against Russia, Turkey in partnership," EU-Russia Center. Available online: <http://www.eu-russiacentre.org/news/czech-eu-presidency-russia-turkey-partnership.html> (accessed on November 14, 2011); cf. also Was the Czech EU presidency's Eastern Partnership summit a success? Český rozhlas. Available online: <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/talking/was-the-czech-eu-presidencys-eastern-partnership-summit-a-success> (accessed on November 14, 2011)

<sup>184</sup> B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, eds., *Eastern Partnership: the opening report*, Warsaw: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2009. Available online: [http://www.sipri.org/research/security/euroatlantic/eu-seminar/documentation/Raport\\_p\\_w\\_2008%20ang.pdf](http://www.sipri.org/research/security/euroatlantic/eu-seminar/documentation/Raport_p_w_2008%20ang.pdf) (accessed on November 14, 2011)

down the Russia-critical rhetoric typical of the then prime minister Topolánek and Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg), but also regarding the long-term Czech policy towards Belarus. In spite of its image as a hardliner towards the regime of President Lukashenko, the CR had already set out on the path towards rapprochement with Belarus at the end of 2008. This was followed by reports about the improvements in the human rights situation in Belarus (the Prague visit of the Belarusian dissident Aleh Hlulak in early March 2009). At the ensuing informal EU ministerial meeting on March 27<sup>th</sup> Czech diplomats started to probe the question of whether Belarus should be invited to the summit.<sup>185</sup> At the same time, the strategy was aimed at inviting “Belarus” and not President Lukashenko himself. Surprisingly, President Klaus, who is otherwise quite friendly towards heads of authoritarian regimes (e.g. in Russia) also expressed his unfavorable view of Lukashenko’s potential visit to Prague, arguing that he would not shake hands with him.<sup>186</sup> In the end, Belarus was represented by Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynav but not the President himself.

The Czech presidency also aimed at gaining at least some level of support for the Eastern Partnership from those countries that were rather suspicious towards the project from its very inception. However, here the presidency was not successful at all, which was clearly visible at the Prague Summit virtually ignored by French President Sarkozy, Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi and his Spanish counterpart Zapatero. The only success was the agreement over the increase in financial resources for the Partnership. The presidency also tried to ensure that sustained attention be paid to the EaP by organizing and financially supporting (together with Poland) an international conference dedicated to the “Future of the Eastern Partnership” in Madrid in January 2010.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> E. Tulmets, “Státy východní dimenze Evropské politiky sousedství v české zahraniční politice,” in M. Kořan, ed., *Česká zahraniční politika v roce 2009*, Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2010, pp. 204–218.

<sup>186</sup> “Czech President not shake hands with Lukashenko,” Charter’97. Available online: <http://charter97.org/en/news/2009/4/20/17467/> (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>187</sup> “Conference Report”. Paper presented at The future of the Eastern Partnership: challenges and opportunities, FRIDE, Madrid, Spain, January 27–28, 2011. Available online: <http://www.fride.org/event/209/the-future-of-the-eastern-partnership:-challenges-and-opportunities> (accessed on November 14, 2011).

### **The main political actors in the CR and their influence on the EaP**

The Eastern Partnership is one of the very few foreign policy issues which are consensually supported across the Czech political spectrum. Even though the positions of the key political parties sometimes differ on several aspects of the EaP (such as the role Russia should play in it), all the parties present in the parliament agree on its importance. However, this general declaration does not always make it into the parties' official documents or it is not reflected in their practical efforts at influencing Czech foreign policy. As recent studies analyzing party positions on Eastern Europe suggest, it is only the Green Party and the Christian Democratic Union–Czechoslovak Popular Party that mention the region among their priorities in their party programs.<sup>188</sup> The Civic Democratic Party does as well; the focus here is, however, primarily on Russia. The other parties (such as the Communists and the Social Democrats) do not mention the partner countries at all.<sup>189</sup>

Among the three main players influencing Czech foreign policy, i.e. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Government and the Presidential Office, there is also a surprising level of overlap of views regarding the Czech role in the Eastern Partnership. This translates a) into a relatively coherent Czech policy towards the EaP and b) into a low level of politicization of the issue. The latter also means that the Czech media almost never discuss the Eastern Partnership and the situation in the partner countries is usually overshadowed by news from Russia.

While the previous Foreign Policy Conception of the CR in the Years 2003–2006 (approved on March 3, 2003) does not list the neighborhood policy among the country's priorities,<sup>190</sup> the new Conception which was approved by the Government on July 20, 2011 takes a very different position. The Conception is very clear in stating that

the CR intends to continue its strong engagement in the EU's activities in the neighborhood, especially in the countries of the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and the Middle East. The CR will go on

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<sup>188</sup> P. Cibulková, "Státy východní dimenze Evropské politiky sousedství v české zahraniční politice". In: M. Kořan, ed., *Česká zahraniční politika v roce 2010*. Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2011, pp. 206–224.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> "Konceptce zahraniční politiky České republiky na léta 2003–2006," Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2002. Ibid.

supporting the European and Euro–Atlantic perspective for the countries of these regions, if their societies express an interest. The CR will aim at strengthening the stability and prosperity in the EU’s environs through the institutional projects of the Union such as the process of EU enlargement, the European Neighborhood Policy and, in particular, the Eastern Partnership and the financial instruments connected with them.<sup>191</sup>

In institutional terms, the key actor is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Here, four departments play the most active role – the Department of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (OSVE), the Department for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (SZBP), the Department of Human Rights and Transformation Assistance (LPTP) and the Department of Development Cooperation (ORS).<sup>192</sup> While in the past, the communication between the bilaterally focused department (OSVE) and those with multilateral agenda (SZBP) was somewhat difficult, today the coordination of Czech Eastern policy works rather well. The EaP has recently also become more relevant for those departments where the Partnership was a marginal issue just two years ago (LPTP and ORS), which is also confirmed by special financial allocations within the ministry dedicated to these departments specifically to increase their engagement in the EaP.

The biggest bottleneck in the formulation of the country’s policy towards the EaP is inter-institutional coordination. While some elements have improved here (the communication between ministries involved in the Partnership), others have become hazier today. To give just one example of the latter, the in-fighting concerning the leadership role in Czech EU policies between the MFA and the Office of the Government has led to a situation where there are two state secretaries responsible for EU affairs, one working for the prime minister, the other for the foreign minister. So far, this has not had repercussions for the EaP since the conflict revolves around internal EU-related policies but the clash creates a general uneasiness and complicates any political decision in which the EU is involved – which is certainly the case with the EaP.

As far as other ministries are concerned, the process of coordination runs smoothly. Apart from irregular informal discussions among the officials from different ministries, there is also the formalized Inter-Minis-

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> “Organizační struktura MZV ČR k 30. říjnu 2011,” Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, Available online: <http://www.mzv.cz/file/73008> (accessed on November 14, 2011).



terial Group for Coordination which meets two to four times a year and tries to remove obstacles to both information sharing and coordination of activities. The ministries that should be mentioned as the most active include the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry for Regional Development and the Ministry of Environment. Of these, the Ministry of Interior has been able to play the most important role, particularly as far as the Prague Process (“migration partnerships”) and labor mobility, border management, and visa facilitation are concerned. The Ministry of Industry and Trade is actively involved in the cooperation in multilateral platforms, particularly in providing the partner countries with experts dealing with the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. Finally, also the initiatives of the Ministry of Education are worth mentioning, particularly the non-paper on the expansion of EU student exchange programs like Erasmus also to include students from the partner countries.

### **The CR’s role in the bilateral dimension of the EaP**

Importantly, bilateral relations between the CR and Eastern Europe are not identical to the bilateral activities of the CR in the framework of the Eastern Partnership. For example, while in bilateral relations, the role of Ukraine (in terms of trade, investment as well as political contacts) is fundamentally more important than the ties to all the other countries, this is not necessarily the case in the EaP. This disparity can be partially explained by the division of labor among the Visegrad Countries (see below), but also by the strategic orientation of the CR. Hence, Belarus may not be an important trading partner but the Czech focus on human rights and transformation policies makes Belarus an important target for the CR’s activities in the EaP. Similarly, the strong ties with Georgia cannot be explained by the number of economic ties alone (even though these are growing as well) but rather by the broader security orientation of both countries.<sup>193</sup>

For a long time, the multilateral format of the Eastern Partnership and the bilateral relations between the CR and the countries involved in the EaP were dealt with on a strictly separate basis. The reasons for this separation were not to be explained rationally, but they should be seen rather

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<sup>193</sup> See the chapter on “Eastern Europe” in M. Kořan, ed., *Czech foreign policy in 2007–2009*, Analysis, Prague: Institute of International Relations, 2010.

as a result of institutional inertia. While the EaP was part of the EU-related agenda from the very beginning, the bilateral ties with the countries of Eastern Europe preceded the creation of the EaP and, indeed the CR's membership in the EU. Only recently has the situation started to change, both at the MFA level (with the involvement of bilaterally oriented departments in the EaP activities) and at the level of activities in the partner countries that now often have the EaP label on them. The danger here, however, is the fact that many measures are in fact not new EaP-inspired ones but old, re-branded activities that the CR would have pursued in any case.

Recently, the CR has started to combine its focus on the Eastern Partnership with its official development cooperation and transformation assistance. Czech development assistance has seen a gradual reduction in the number of priority countries from twenty countries in 2020 to eight in 2004. Of these eight countries, Moldova was included as an ENP partner country in 2004. The newest Conception of Foreign Development Cooperation for the years 2010–2017 from May 2010 targets five priority countries with a program for cooperation and another six priority countries without. Moldova is still present in the first group, but Georgia, which is another partner country, was added to the second group.<sup>194</sup> In Moldova, Czech activities are well established and they focus on agriculture, projects in the areas of health care, environmental protection and social development. In 2009, the CR became the EU's supporting facilitator in Moldova, hence playing an intermediary role between the local authorities, other EU donor countries and the locally present NGOs. As far as Georgia is concerned, the Czech presence in the country is to a large extent related to the post-conflict reconstruction following the end of the Russian–Georgian War in August 2008. But the CR is prepared to continue its presence in the country, not least because the prioritization of development assistance is further strengthened by active Czech–Georgian ties in the EaP and Czech support for the country's transformation.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> “Konceptce zahraniční rozvojové spolupráce České republiky na období 2010–2017,” Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2010. Available online: [http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni\\_vztahy/rozvojova\\_spoluprace/koncepce\\_publicace/koncepce\\_zrs\\_cr\\_2010\\_2017.html](http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/rozvojova_spoluprace/koncepce_publicace/koncepce_zrs_cr_2010_2017.html) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

Apart from Moldova and Georgia, the third key partner for the CR is Ukraine. Unlike with Moldova and Georgia, however, a strong conviction prevails at the Czech MFA that here the CR cannot play a leading role and that it should, therefore, support the cooperation with Ukraine in various multilateral forums, primarily the Visegrad Group.<sup>196</sup>

The same three partner countries are also mentioned among the priority areas of the Czech Republic's official transformation policy – Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, but Belarus has been added as well (together with six others from other parts of the world).<sup>197</sup> The activities here range from support for civic participation in local politics, media plurality and transparency and anti-corruption measures (Georgia) to support for the democratic opposition (Belarus), economic transformation know-how and the democratization of municipalities (Moldova), and to sustainable development, environmental protection and the mitigation of ethnic tensions (Ukraine).<sup>198</sup>

### **The CR's initiatives in the multilateral dimension of the EaP**

The prevailing view among Czech diplomats today is that the multilateral framework does not work as it should. The reasons might be simply the low level of interest of the partner countries, for which bilateral ties are clearly a priority direction or the slow start of the multilateral cooperation that is still gaining momentum.<sup>199</sup> However, there are specific areas where the CR has been active, in particular 1) the involvement of the civil societies of the partner countries in the EaP and 2) public administration reform.

As far as the first is concerned, the focus on civil society has been traditionally linked to the Czech diplomacy's emphasis on human rights and political transformation. Additionally, civil society is perceived as "the most influential constituency that fights for EU approximation."<sup>200</sup> It is no coincidence that the proposal to establish the Civil Society Forum was

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<sup>196</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011.

<sup>197</sup> "Prioritní země a projekty transformační spolupráce," Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2011. Available online: [http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni\\_vztahy/lidska\\_prava/prioritni\\_zeme\\_a\\_projekty\\_transformacni/index.html](http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/lidska_prava/prioritni_zeme_a_projekty_transformacni/index.html) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011.

<sup>200</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011.

endorsed in Prague.<sup>201</sup> Also, although the Forum was formally launched only in fall 2009 in Brussels, the Czech presidency supported an international conference organized in Prague on the sidelines of the Eastern Partnership Summit, which was attended by many representatives of civil society organizations throughout the partner countries.<sup>202</sup>

Of the many Czech activities supporting the Civil Society Forum two stand out. The first is the intention to organize one of the next meetings of the Forum in Prague, and this idea seems to be strongly supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>203</sup> The second pertains to the establishment of the forum's secretariat. The creation of a stable secretariat (which runs counter to the original claims about there being no need to institutionalize the EaP) was originally supported by the CR, Poland, Sweden, and Germany, and later gained the support of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands as well. Since the European Commission will only be able to start financing it in 2012 (this being dependent on the evaluation of the proposal, which will be submitted to the Civil Society Facility), the CR, together with several like-minded countries offered national contributions which would cover the secretariat's expenditures in 2011. However, because of the disagreement among the forum's members regarding the appropriate legal form, the financial transfer could not be effected and so the secretariat has not been established so far.

The second field where the CR intends to be more active than elsewhere is the promotion of public administration reforms, which is part of the first multilateral platform.<sup>204</sup> The CR has already organized two workshops focusing on local and regional administrations – one in Kharkov on

<sup>201</sup> First meeting of the Civil Society Forum (November 16–17, 2009). Available online: [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/civil\\_society/first\\_csf\\_meeting\\_2009\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/civil_society/first_csf_meeting_2009_en.htm) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>202</sup> Eastern Partnership: towards a Civil Society Forum, conference programme (May 5–7, 2009). Available online: [http://www.google.cz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=civil%20society%20forum%20prague&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEAQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/civil\\_society/first\\_csf\\_meeting\\_2009\\_en.htm](http://www.google.cz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=civil%20society%20forum%20prague&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEAQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/civil_society/first_csf_meeting_2009_en.htm) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>203</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011.

<sup>204</sup> “Joint decision of the platform Democracy, Good Governance and Stability to establish the Eastern Partnership panel on Public Administration Reform,” Official Site of Eastern Partnership. Available online: [http://www.easternpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2011.10.06\\_eap\\_panel\\_on\\_par.pdf](http://www.easternpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2011.10.06_eap_panel_on_par.pdf) (accessed November 14, 2011).

October 10–14, 2010 and the other in Prague on November 7–13, 2010.<sup>205</sup> In Kharkov, 25 experts from all six partner countries were present. The workshop dealt with the fight against corruption, with regional disparities, with e-governance and citizens' participation in politics at the local level. Here, the Czech approach combined both direct contacts between the official representatives of the CR (ministry officials, ambassadors) and the participation of Czech civil society (such as the non-profit organization People in Need), which has proven to be a successful format and will be most probably repeated in the future.

While the CR is one of the most active promoters of public administration reforms in the partner countries, its influence is impeded by two factors: first, there is a lack of real policy coordination among the Visegrad Group and, more generally, the new member states. As much as the CR would like to be seen as the leader in this area, Estonia has the same ambition, which is reflected in the establishment of the Eastern Partnership Center with the same focus in Tallinn;<sup>206</sup> and Poland is very active in this area as well (cf. the establishment of the EaP Public Administration Academy next year). The second factor undermining its influence is the poor record of public administration in the CR itself, where corruption is rampant and local and regional administrations face a number of serious problems. In spite of this, the Czech ambition is to organize at least one workshop of this kind every year, usually supported by both the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Interior.

As far as other multilateral initiatives are concerned, the support for an additional two should be mentioned: Euronest and the European Endowment for Democracy. However, in neither of these does the Czech Republic want to play a leadership role and the key role played by Poland is recognized in both. Hence, in both cases Czech diplomats first approached the initiatives with reservations and only after Poland started to seek support for its plans among its allies (be they "the like-minded countries" or the Visegrad Group members), did Prague also become more involved.

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<sup>205</sup> "Implementation of the Eastern Partnership: report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, December 13, 2010 (conference report)," The European Union External Action Service. Available online: [http://www.eas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/eap\\_meeting\\_foreign\\_affairs\\_131210\\_en.pdf](http://www.eas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/eap_meeting_foreign_affairs_131210_en.pdf) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>206</sup> R. Taammsaar, "From co-operation with our Eastern neighbours to Eastern Partnership," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia. Available online: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/node/10936> (accessed on November 14, 2011).

As far as Euronest is concerned, ministry officials complain about difficulties in cooperating with the Czech members of the European Parliament who have not yet met with the Czech special ambassador for the Eastern Partnership, Petr Mareš. This is further complicated by the reluctance of Czech MEPs to put aside their domestic differences and push for a common Czech agenda.<sup>207</sup>

The CR has also been quite successful in promoting wider links between the Visegrad Four and other political actors, both inside the EU and between the partner countries. An example of this is the planned ministerial meeting of the V4 in spring 2012. The meeting will be held jointly by ministers from the V4 countries, but representatives of the partner countries will be invited as well. In addition, high-level EU officials will most probably be present as well (Commissioner Füle). Currently, negotiations are under way over the possible invitation of foreign ministers of other member states (thus replicating the format of extending the V4 meetings to other EU member states, as was the case with Germany in March 2011).<sup>208</sup>

Unlike in the above mentioned core areas of Czech involvement in the EaP, Prague was unable to push through its ideas in several other multilateral undertakings. The most visible example of such a failure is the Czech emphasis on energy security during its EU Presidency. The Southern Corridor, the most beloved among Czech EaP related projects, was listed among the Partnership's "flagship initiatives", only to be left out of official documents soon after the presidency ended.<sup>209</sup> Also, the emphasis of the subsequent Swedish residency on a different interpretation of energy security, i.e. on the link between energy and environmental protection, further weakened the original plans of the CR. Finally, the low visibility of energy security in the EaP is also due to the critical attitude of some partner countries towards it (e.g. Armenia).

Further multilateral failures, as perceived by Czech diplomats, included the EU's inability to invest more resources into the extension of trans-

<sup>207</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011.

<sup>208</sup> The Visegrad Group meets in Bratislava. Foreign Office of Germany. Available online: <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/AAmt/BM-Reisen/2011/03-UKR-Slowakei/110303-Slowakei-node.html> (accessed on November 14, 2011).

<sup>209</sup> The Eastern Partnership – flagship initiatives. The European Union External Action Service. Available online: [http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/initiatives/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/initiatives/index_en.htm) (accessed on November 14, 2011).

European networks to the partner countries. Although Prague had “big plans” here, the burgeoning economic recession put all of them on the back burner. On the more general level, Ministry officials are also disappointed by the limited appeal of the Visegrad cooperation in the Partnership – obviously the deeply entrenched hostilities in South Caucasus cannot be overcome by pointing to the successes of the Visegrad Group.<sup>210</sup> There is a similar level of disappointment over the principle of joint ownership that remains a mere rhetorical exercise that does not substantially change the working of the EC’s bureaucracy or the nascent External Action Service. As a result, there is no deep sense of joint ownership in the partner countries, nor is the Partnership seen as a common EU project in many of the member states in the Union itself.<sup>211</sup>

## Recommendations

### *Better inter-ministerial coordination within individual countries*

Although the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs is undisputedly the main center of Czech policy towards the EaP countries, other ministries play an important role as well. However, it is difficult to control the activities undertaken by the ministries and the quantity and quality are dependent on the ad hoc personnel situation at the ministries. This has a doubly negative effect – the country’s involvement in the multilateral dimension of the EaP is less than optimal and vice versa there is less information regarding the experience of Czech officials with the platforms. This also applies to the attendance of ministry officials at the meetings of the multilateral frameworks; most ministries do not see these as a priority. Substituting ministry officials with diplomats from the local embassies is not a viable solution since the diplomats are often not familiar with the rather technical nature of the work.<sup>212</sup> A possible remedy to this is stronger institutionalization of inter-ministerial coordination including domestic action plans with preset time schedules that would encourage the ministries to participate in EaP related activities and maintain a basic level of continuity.

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<sup>210</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2, 2011.

<sup>211</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011.

<sup>212</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 9, 2011.

### *Visibility of the EaP inside the V4 countries*

Although the EaP enjoys considerable support from political elites in all four Visegrad countries, the general public might not be so inclined to adopt the governments' position in seeing the EaP countries as foreign policy priorities. Hence, more attention should be dedicated to raising awareness about the EaP, the ENP and the relevance of the Eastern Europe region in general. However, informing the public about V4 policies in Eastern Europe may be rather tricky. Currently, at least in the Czech Republic, the depoliticized nature of the Eastern Partnership coupled with the low level of public interest mean that decision making is rather unhampered and expert-oriented. Once the public has been informed about the government's support for further EU enlargement and for a visa-free regime with EaP countries, a public backlash cannot be ruled out. In spite of this risk, we believe that higher levels of awareness about Eastern Europe remain a basic prerequisite for the long-term deep involvement of the V4 in the East.

### *A further increase in the International Visegrad Fund*

Within the Visegrad Four, the International Visegrad Fund has proven to be one of the most effective instruments in promoting cooperation at local and regional levels. Hence, the idea to allocate funds aimed at directly supporting the Eastern Partnership is to be welcomed (each of the V4 member states will contribute €250,000). However, given the rather meager support for the EaP provided by the EU in general, it would be of tremendous importance to further increase these allocations, especially for projects that are directly relevant for the partner countries such as mobility and visa facilitation, small and medium enterprises, promoting elements of public administration reform etc.

### *Involvement of external donors*

One example in which external donors have been successfully involved in supporting the EaP, based on a Czech initiative, is the US Emerging Donors Challenge Fund.<sup>213</sup> The idea behind this fund is to have a third party, in this case the United States of America, co-finance programs of transformation and development assistance in selected EaP countries (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova). Although the co-financ-

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<sup>213</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 9, 2011.



ing procedures are still rather unclear and the administrative burden is heavy, the added value (both in terms of financial resources and human resources) is substantial. The CR informed its Visegrad partners about the possibility of introducing this source of co-financing, which led to a decision to co-finance projects in several vital areas such as the role of media in elections, support for local think-tank networks etc. This or similar forms of co-financing should also be explored in relation to other “third countries,” such as Japan, Norway or Switzerland.

### *Increasing the relevance of V4 regional cooperation as a template for the EaP*

Given the many difficulties related to the political developments in some of the V4 countries and the ensuing tensions between the V4 members, Visegrad regional cooperation has been surprisingly successful so far. Not only has it survived the periods of bilateral disputes between its member states but it has also been able to influence the wider region, both through the participation of representatives of other EU countries at its meetings (Germany, the Baltic countries) or through the support of the Eastern Partnership. However, the V4 have not managed to transform their experience so that it might contribute to regional cooperation either between Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova or – even more importantly – between the three Caucasian EaP participants. As different as the situations in Central Europe and in South Caucasus may be, Czech diplomats are convinced the regional experience is a neglected asset, which has so far not been tapped by the Visegrad Group in its activities in Eastern Europe.<sup>214</sup>

### *Overcoming the persistent rivalry both within and without the Visegrad Four*

Although there are regular political consultations during which priority areas for activities in the EaP are discussed among the V4 countries, these consultations unfortunately have very little effect on the practical outcomes, which often tend to duplicate themselves. An example of this is the activities of Estonia, Poland, and the Czech Republic in the first platform, particularly as far as public administration reforms are concerned.

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<sup>214</sup> Interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2011 and Interview 2, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2, 2011.

While it is possible to ensure some synergy between the three countries' steps, the newly established centers, both in Poland and in Estonia<sup>215</sup> make it clear that there is a fight for regional leadership in this area. This has negative effects both on the coherence of the EaP and on funding opportunities, which are rather limited at the moment. The key thing here (as in other areas) is to convince Poland that coordinating these activities is beneficial not only for the smaller countries in Central and Eastern Europe but also for Poland itself. This will be a difficult task though since Poland is the only new EU member state that has the sufficient diplomatic, financial, and symbolic resources that allow the country to "go it alone" even in the case of the biggest partner country – Ukraine. There are already some formalized procedures through which the External Action Service gathers information from the member states regarding their preferred areas of cooperation in the EaP framework. It would be quite useful – before the EEAS's queries of this kind are answered – to have a round of information sharing and consultation among the V4, which would preclude any unnecessary overlapping of priorities. Another option is a more formalized strategy of regular discussions among the V4 (possibly extended to include the Baltic states or other like-minded countries) where priorities and future plans would be discussed before a final EU-wide decision was taken.

While the above mentioned recommendations tackle those issues where the efforts of both individual V4 members and the Group as a whole should be increased, there are a number of areas where the priorities and focus are correct. Here, what is to be recommended is sustained, innovative, and consistent support for activities already in existence. These areas include:

- 1) support for the civil societies in the partner countries to complement the necessarily strong links between the EU and the governments of the EaP states;
- 2) a strong focus on the first multilateral platform, as this platform is undoubtedly the most relevant;
- 3) attempts to create links between EU programs and projects offered to partner countries or, even more importantly, the direct inclusion of the partner countries within these programs.

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<sup>215</sup> Rein Taammsaar, "From co-operation with our Eastern neighbours to Eastern Partnership". Ibid.